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SOVIET ATTITUDE TOWARD GERMAN NEGOTIATIONS

The recent Pravda article and unofficial Soviet proposals for the unification of Germany have again raised speculation over whether Moscow intends to resume negotiations on Germany. Communist claims of willingness to settle outstanding issues appear to represent the latest attempt to fan West German aspirations for unification and a peace treaty and to encourage European hopes for a relaxation of tension. There is no real evidence, however, that the USSR is ready to enter into serious negotiations for a German settlement.

Pravda bluntly states that the President's speech does not offer a basis for the solution of the German question. Furthermore, a study of the past diplomatic positions on Germany reveals that the area of Soviet maneuverability is very small.

In the long battle of diplomatic notes of a year ago and in the Foreign Ministers Conferences that preceded them, the USSR consistently showed that it was unwilling to make any concessions that would involve the loss of its vital economic and strategic interests in East Germany. Throughout the exchange on German unification Moscow demonstrated that its long range objective remains that of a united Germany under Soviet control. Having failed, however, to attain this objective in the four-power conferences following World War II, and observing that the West was beginning to build up West Germany, the Kremlin has recently concentrated on consolidating its position in East Germany and on blocking West German rearmament and integration into EDC and NATO.

Thus Moscow initiated last year's exchange of notes primarily to convince the West Germans that alignment of the Federal Republic with EDC and NATO would seal the division of Germany. These notes were designed to affect West German public opinion by playing on the unity theme without ever meeting the Western demand that an all-German government first be freely elected to participate in the treaty negotiations.

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The Soviet attitude grew more adamant as Moscow became convinced of Western insistence on the matter of free elections and as the West German Government progressed toward ratification of EDC. In the fourth and last note on 23 August 1952, Moscow reiterated its proposals to discuss a peace treaty first, then the formation of an all-German government, and finally free elections. By this time a stalemate had not only been reached over the matter of free elections, but Moscow had in effect retrogressed from its original position that an all-German government should participate in treaty negotiations.

Since the advent of the Malenkov regime there have been a number of indirect hints, such as the Chuikov letter to a West German neutralist group and the East German letter to the British Parliament, that Moscow is again willing to negotiate.

To give the impression that the Kremlin's new leaders are willing to reach a settlement on Germany -- the outstanding point of East-West conflict in Europe -- Moscow may be preparing to send a new note on the German peace treaty. Any such note would not be likely to meet Western conditions for a settlement, rather it would be designed to discredit the Western position in Germany, to undermine the Adenauer government and to block or delay French ratification of EDC. A new note might well contain devices such as a proposal for simultaneous discussions of elections and the peace treaty and might reiterate Soviet proposals for withdrawal of troops and all-German participation in the treaty negotiations. By such proposals the USSR would attempt to force the West to negotiate on Soviet terms and to counter the Western challenge to the Soviet Union for Austrian treaty negotiations.

It is possible that in order to create the impression that it wishes to relax tension in Europe, Moscow might also call for a general European Conference in which it would attempt to prove Western intransigence while the Soviet Union claimed willingness to make concessions on issues such as Austria or Trieste.

To date, however, the USSR has given no indication that it is seeking negotiations on European questions. It is more probable, therefore, that Moscow will capitalize on promoting a cease fire in Korea and some minor concessions to achieve its "peace offensive" objective.

In conclusion there is little likelihood that Moscow will enter into serious negotiations on Germany as long as the West adheres to the principle of first holding free elections. The outcome of such elections would mean the overthrow of the Communist regime in East Germany and be a serious blow to the prestige of the Communist cause. If followed by a withdrawal of troops it would also deprive the Soviet Union of its only effective means of retaining a grip on Germany.

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